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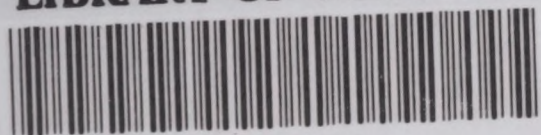
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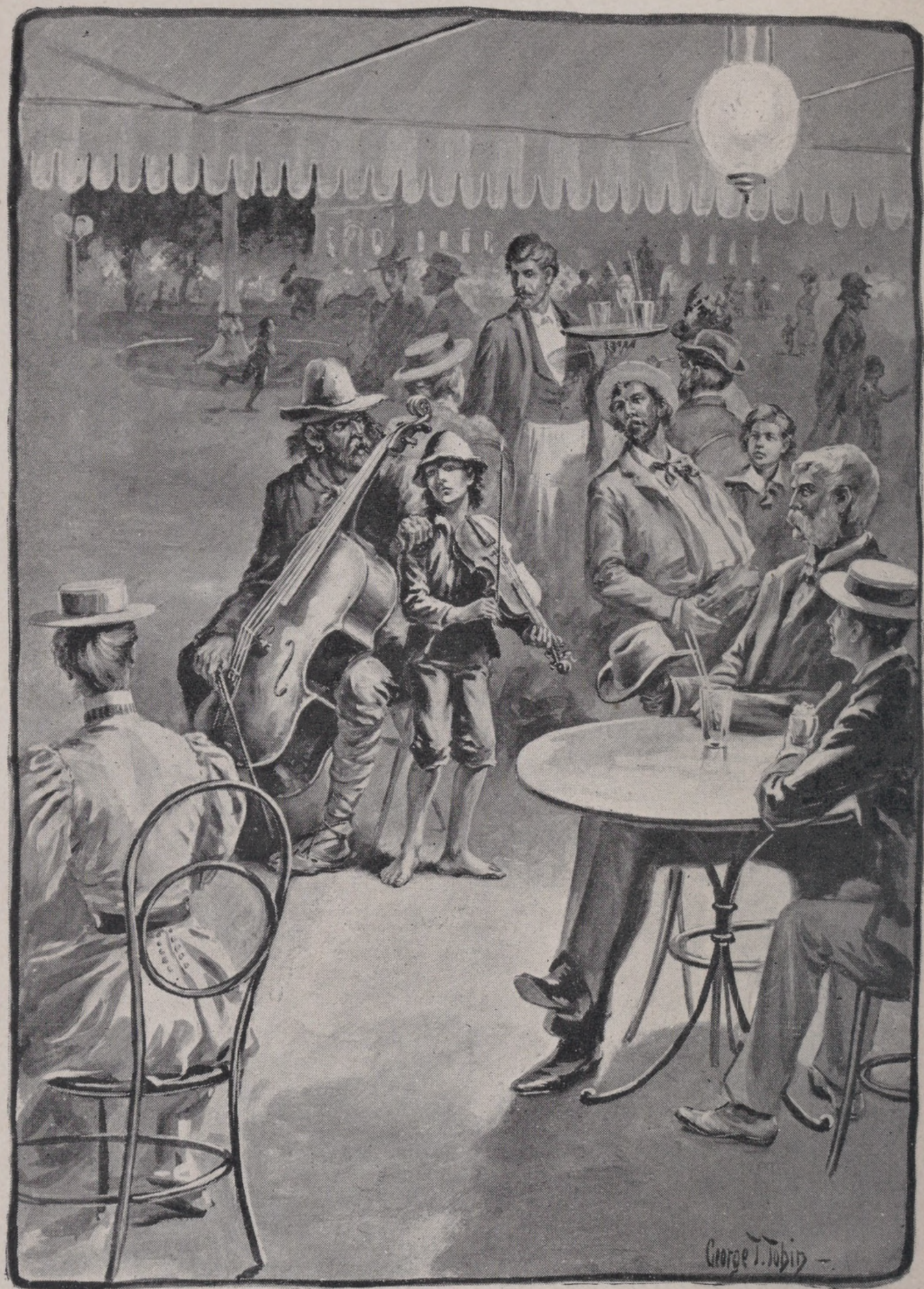


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"THAT LITTLE CHAP KNOWS HOW TO PLAY, DOESN'T HE?" (Page 7.)

BEPPINO

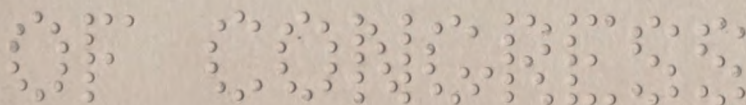
By

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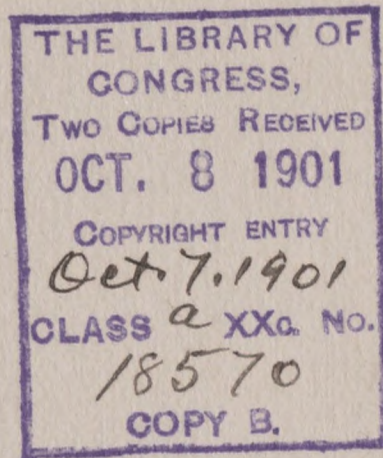


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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE.
A JULY NIGHT.....	5

CHAPTER II.

BEPPINO'S FIRST GOOD TIME.....	16
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

"WHERE IS MY VIOLIN?"	27
-----------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

POOR LITTLE BEPPINO!.....	39
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

THE CAVE IN THE HILLSIDE.....	50
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

JOY IN THE MORNING.....	59
-------------------------	----

ILLUSTRATIONS.

“That little chap knows how to play, doesn’t
he?” Frontispiece. ✓

FACING
PAGE

“How beautiful it is!” Beppino said..... 16 ✓

“He ran swiftly”..... 32 ✓

“Don’t go up,” she said in a whisper..... 48 ✓

“Don’t you dare to come back!” she cried..... 54 ✓

“He stooped and drew out a water-soaked violin”..... 58 ✓

BEPPINO.

CHAPTER I.

A JULY NIGHT.

IT was so hot that night! Everybody in Rome was out on the street trying to catch a whiff of the sea breeze which came in from the Mediterranean. The lights on the Via Nazionale—National Street—glittered and twinkled. In front of the cafés, out on the sidewalk, so close to the road that people could not find room to go by, were many little tables, surrounded by ladies and gentlemen. Nearly all of the people were eating ice cream, not in big platefuls, as one sees it at home, but in small portions heaped up in pretty glasses. The ladies fanned themselves, and the children laughed, and everyone talked as fast as they could, in soft Italian, which sounds as though it were all “Os” and “Ahs.”

It was eleven o'clock, and the air was steadily growing cooler. Up the street came a man, and walking by his side was a boy, perhaps ten years of age. He was a little, delicate fellow, but his face looked old, perhaps because he had not had very much fun in his short life.

"Beppino," said the man who was with the child, "wake up! There's no use your trying any dodges on me. Sleepy or not sleepy, you must play at this café. There are crowds of people out to-night—rich ones, too. Do you hear?" He gave Beppino a little shake.

"I hear," said the child, in a weary voice. "But, O Giovanni, I'm so tired!"

They were now almost in front of the café, and the man could not say any more for fear of being overheard, so he only shook his finger at the boy, in a way peculiar to the Italians, and which promised severe punishment if his orders were not obeyed.

The lad took from under his arm a violin, and, carefully tuning it, he commenced to play a gay melody, to the accompaniment of the 'cello which Giovanni carried. It sounded as if the wind were blowing in the trees and the birds were singing merrily. The people sitting

at the tables turned to look at the little musician, and the man, Giovanni, chuckled over the thought of how many soldi—pennies—he would receive.

At a table quite near the boy sat two men. One, evidently the father, was gray-haired, but had a very kindly face. The other was a lad of about sixteen, with fair hair and beautiful blue eyes. They were Englishmen.

“That little chap knows how to play, doesn’t he, father?” said the boy, whose name was Robert Carroll. “But do look at him! He is so sleepy that he can scarcely keep his eyes open.”

The father smiled as he looked at the child. His bow was moving over the strings as though he were so familiar with the tune that he could play it even in his sleep, and over the violin his head was nodding. His eyes were closed, and he swayed back and forth.

“Poor little chap!” said Mr. Carroll. “He is tired out.”

At that moment Giovanni’s eyes caught sight of Beppino. With a rough shake he woke him so suddenly that a bewildered look on the child’s face went to Mr. Carroll’s heart.

“Poor little chap!” repeated the gentleman, and then beckoned to Giovanni.

“Is he your son?” he asked, as the Italian ran quickly to him, expecting some money.

“No, signore, he is only Beppino. I do not know his other name. Eight years ago my wife found him wandering about the streets of Rome. He could not tell anything about himself, except that his name was Beppino.”

“And did you not try to find his parents?”

“Yes, sir. That is, we tried a little, but it was no use. He was dressed in very common clothes, and had nothing about him to identify him. Besides,” Giovanni showed his white teeth, “we really liked the child, and wanted to keep him.”

“That is to say, you found out his unusual talent for music and made money off him,” said the gentleman, sharply.

“Just as the signore wishes,” replied Giovanni, shrugging his shoulders and smiling. It made little difference to him what the English gentleman thought, anyway. They were all queer, these English. However, it would be a very good thing if the stranger should take a fancy to little Beppino. These English were

all very rich. "He has a wonderful gift for music," he continued. "If I were not so poor, I would get him a teacher. But, alas!" he rolled up his eyes, "I have no money. And I love the boy as if he were my own."

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Carroll. He did not like the man's looks nor his words.

Robert had been eagerly listening to the conversation, and now he broke in, "Do you mean to say that the child has never had any lessons?"

"Except those which I, myself, have given him he has had none, signorino. Almost all that he plays he composes himself."

"Wonderful!" and Robert's thoughts flew regretfully back to his own experience. He was trying hard to learn to play the violin. He had the best teacher in Rome, and a violin which had cost a large sum of money; yet he could only play a few simple tunes, while this child, on his cheap instrument, brought out the music of a genius. "Can't we have him come to see us and play for us to-morrow?" he whispered to his father. "I am sure it would amuse mamma."

Mr. Carroll nodded, and they both watched the boy.

Beppino had wakened up at last, and having finished his list of pieces, was passing from table to table, collecting on a small metal plate the coins which were given to him. He came last to the table where Mr. Carroll and his son were sitting, near which Giovanni still stood. Mr. Carroll dropped a silver franc into the plate, and Giovanni's sharp eyes glittered. Here was truly luck! Now if they would only take a fancy to Beppino! It was a very sweet, patient face which the child turned up to Mr. Carroll. It bore upon it the marks of hard treatment, little to eat, and some signs of physical suffering. The eyes were large and of a soft brown. His hair was rather long and curly, and his cheeks were white and thin.

Mr. Carroll placed his hand on the boy's head so gently that Beppino looked up in wonder, and then his eyes filled with tears. People never touched him in that kind of way.

“Will you come and see us to-morrow and bring your violin, Beppino? My boy, there, plays on the violin, too—”

“But not as you do,” interrupted Robert, full of boyish enthusiasm.

His father smiled. “We think he plays pretty well,” he continued. “Will you come?”

Beppino lifted his eyes to his master. Giovanni nodded.

“Yes, signore,” the boy replied.

“Very well.” Mr. Carroll rose.

“Mayn’t he have a glass of ‘bibite?’” asked Robert.

“That’s a good idea! Waiter, bring two glasses of bibite, with ice,” and Mr. Carroll motioned the surprised Italian into a chair. Giovanni had received pennies before, and even an occasional franc, but never had anyone asked him to sit down at a table in a café where rich people were.

“A thousand thanks,” he said, touching his soft hat and awkwardly seating himself, telling Beppino to do the same. But he muttered under his breath:

“The English are certainly very queer indeed!”

Ah! how good that “bibite” was on that stifling night! The raspberry syrup and water were so spicy and sweet, and the ice made it so

deliciously cold. Beppino was wide enough awake now and sipped away at the rosy liquid, wishing that it might last forever. But no matter how slowly he drank it, it *would* grow less, and it was with a sigh that he drained the last drop and carefully bestowed the last piece of ice in his mouth.

“Was it good?” asked Robert, who had watched the boy’s enjoyment with great delight.

Beppino gave a short nod, and a smile spread over his little white face.

“Can’t you thank the gentlemen?” said Giovanni, looking at him threateningly.

“Thank you, sir,” the child replied, timidly, and then, shrinking back, as though he expected a blow, he went out into the street.

“Here is my card,” said Mr. Carroll to Giovanni. “The boy had better come about four o’clock to-morrow.”

He turned to go away, but Giovanni followed. “The gentleman will, of course, not forget to make me some payment,” he said, with a grin. “I shall lose a great deal in the hour which Beppino spends with him.”

“I will see that you lose nothing.”

Giovanni lifted his old hat in token of much respect, and, taking Beppino's hand, went away with him. The streets were not so full of people now, for it was midnight. "Hurry up, there," exclaimed Giovanni, roughly; "we have a long way to go. It's only rich people that can afford to live in these fine houses in the city."

Beppino tried hard to keep up with the long steps of his master, but he was now once more very sleepy, and, in spite of himself, he dragged behind. Fortunately, Giovanni was so much engaged in thinking about the Englishman, and wondering how much money he could manage to get out of him, that he did not notice it. Out through the dark streets, along the broad road they went, far on to the city gate. Off on the right rose a beautiful church. On the top of it there were marble statues, in the center of which was a figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, with his hand outstretched, as if blessing these two wanderers. Inside the church there were altars and images and great pictures, and here the mother of Jesus was bowed down to and worshiped. Giovanni and Beppino paid no heed to the church, which at midnight stood so

still, and passed out under an old gateway into the country.

Another five minutes' walk brought them to a row of houses, once intended to be fine dwellings. Unfortunately, there was no more money, so they were left half done, with only the outside walls and the floors and window frames. Many poor families lived in these half-built houses without paying any rent.

Giovanni led the sleepy boy into a low room on the ground floor of one of these buildings. Then he struck him with his big hand. "Lie there now and sleep!" he said.

The boy half-stunned by the blow on his head, rolled himself into a little ball against the wall, with no bed under him, and no covering over him, and was soon unconscious.

On a warm night these houses, roofless and windowless, were cool and comfortable; it was on the winter nights, when a bitter wind blew down from the mountains, that the poor of Rome suffered great misery.

A slovenly woman lifted herself from a corner of the room. "Is it you, Giovanni?"

"Yes, Assunta, and I tell you, we're in luck. I took in three francs to-night, and to-morrow

Beppino is to go to a rich Englishman to play for him, and he's to pay me well."

"Rodolfo shall go, too," responded the woman, quickly. "Maybe the Englishman might adopt him."

"Just as you please," said Giovanni, and in a few moments all were sleeping.

CHAPTER II.

BEPPINO'S FIRST GOOD TIME.

THE bright June sun shone in through the open window frames of the old house outside the gates of Rome. It was a desolate place, indeed. There were no pretty pieces of furniture, no pictures to please the eye, only bare, unplastered walls and a mud floor, which, when the fall rains came on, was covered with water.

Beppino moved, then rubbed his eyes and sat up. Over on the other side of the room lay Assunta, the coarse, hard wife of his master, the only mother he had ever known. Poor little lad! she had been worse than no mother at all! In other parts of the room were the children, dirty and ragged. There were five of them, ranging from eight to one year, and they begged daily on the streets of Rome. Beppino was the only one among them all who earned an honest living.

He got up softly, stepped over the bodies of



"HOW BEAUTIFUL IT IS!" BEPPINO SAID. (Page 21.)

his adopted brothers and sisters, and went out into the fresh air. It was a beautiful day, and the sun was turning the range of mountains which surrounds Rome into colors of amethyst and blue and rose. Beppino did not look at the mountains in their glory; he was used to them. He sat down on the ground by an old wall, over which some fragrant flowers were drooping, and thought. So, to-day, he was to go to play for the gentleman who had laid his hand so gently on his head. Were there many people like him in the world? he wondered. He had never met them before, if there were.

A loud voice at his side made the little fellow jump. It was Rodolfo speaking, and he woke the child rudely enough from his dreaming.

“Hello, Beppino! So you’re going to the Englishman’s to-day, are you?” he said, slapping the other boy on the shoulder.

Beppino was older than Rodolfo by two years, but the younger lad was as tall as he—perhaps because he had had better care and more love, for Assunta worshiped her oldest son. He had been spoiled by being allowed to do exactly what he pleased, and although not really a bad boy, was very rude and bold.

“How did you know?” asked Beppino, surprised.

“I heard father say so last night when he came home. That was a pretty good knock he gave you, wasn’t it?” The boy laughed loudly.

Beppino blushed until his white face was crimson. His little hands clinched. Would the day ever come when he should be a man, and could pay back all these insults?

“And I’m going with you,” continued Rodolfo, delighted to tease his playmate.

“You!”

“Yes, I, Rodolfo Perini! Signor Nobody, how do you like that? Haven’t I as good a right as you to go?”

Beppino made no reply. All the pleasure of a visit to a great gentleman’s house would be spoiled if Rodolfo were to go, too. He choked back a tear and turned away. The other boy called after him: “You needn’t cry, baby. Mother said I was to go, and you know that what mother says is done, in this house.”

Yes, poor Beppino knew that well enough. Many a time had he borne the punishment of the other children because Assunta had told Giovanni things which never happened.

“Come here and get a piece of bread,” called Assunta’s harsh voice, and each child received a portion of the dark loaf which served for the family breakfast.

In another half hour the whole family was on its way through the old gate and into the city, where the streets were filled with venders of fruit and vegetables and the carts of the market women. Assunta and the children went to their accustomed stand on one of the corners where there were many persons passing by, and, through a pretense of being worthy, poverty-stricken people, they received a good many pennies in the course of the day from the generous Italians.

Giovanni, with his son Rodolfo and Beppino, went into the broad, new part of the city, stopping occasionally to play before some window. Soon a crowd gathered around, and Giovanni was well satisfied with the result of the collection, which Rodolfo took up, as his share in the work. At noontime they had a long rest in the shade of a big church, lying lazily on the ground. A little fruit and another chunk of bread formed their dinner, but they were quite contented with that, for they seldom got any-

thing better to eat. Beppino could never remember the taste of meat. Sometimes Giovanni and Assunta had had a little, but the children, especially Beppino, rarely shared in the feast. The man took in a good deal of money, by dint of the begging of the children and the profits which he made off of Beppino, but he threw it away on lottery tickets, hoping to win a great prize, which he never got, and what remained after these ventures he spent at the "Trattoria," for the red wine of the country. Beppino dreaded those nights, for he always received a heavy blow.

The street on which the Englishman lived was wide and the houses were all handsome. There were many balconies, with pots of flowers, roses and lilies, sweet and fresh-looking in the midst of the heat. Beppino looked around him with wonder and pleasure as the three mounted the marble stairs. Down in a shady court, in the middle of the house, a fountain was splashing, with lacy ferns growing about it. An ancient marble statue, which had adorned some palace many hundreds of years before, stood on one side of the court, and near it the *portiera*, who guarded the door, sat knitting.

“How beautiful it is!” Beppino said, but Giovanni grasped his hand tighter, and replied in a loud whisper:

“Don’t you dare to make one bit of noise, you young imp. If you do, you know what you’ll get when we go home.”

Beppino trembled at the threatening look and said nothing more.

Mr. Carroll and his wife and son had come from a pleasant country home in England the September before to spend the winter in Rome. In April Mrs. Carroll had been taken very ill, so ill that they feared she would die. When she got a little better she was still too weak to leave the city and go into the cool mountains, and that was how it happened that the family was still in Rome, even though the torrid heat of summer was upon the beautiful country of Italy.

The room in which the lady lay, and into which the three wanderers were shown, seemed to the two boys like a bit out of heaven. Even rough Giovanni was impressed by it, and stood twirling his soft hat in his hands. The lady, who had a very sweet face, lay on a couch by the open window, through which she could look

down at the queer, irregular roofs of old Rome. Fragrant odors came in on the air, and near her, in a tall crystal vase, was a great bunch of white lilies with yellow hearts. There were soft carpets and fine paintings and comfortable easy chairs. It was no wonder that the poor little lads from the unfinished house outside the walls looked at everything with their mouths wide open.

In one corner was a grand piano, and on it Robert Carroll laid his violin when his visitors entered.

“Father will be here in a moment,” he said, kindly. “Is this another violinist?” He took Rodolfo’s brown hand.

“No, sir,” Giovanni replied, clearing his throat. He felt very strange indeed in this elegant room. “That’s my son Rodolfo.”

“O! Glad to see you. Please sit down. Now, little Beppino, are you ready to play? Here’s my mother, who wants to hear you.”

The child shot a quick glance at the lady in her pretty white dress. “She looks like the pictures of the Madonna,” he thought. Beppino’s only idea of womanly beauty was derived from the paintings of the mother of our Sav-

iour, as he had seen them in the Catholic churches, where the priests in their golden vestments said mass. Timidly he took up his violin and commenced to play. Very soft and sad was the melody that swelled out, and the child forgot himself in his music.

“Well done!” called out Mr. Carroll, who had entered during the playing.

“Give him the Stradivarius, Robert. Let’s see what sort of sounds he brings out of that.”

Little Beppino took the costly violin, knowing nothing of its value or its great age. He touched it gently with the bow, and then it seemed to him as though the room and the beautiful lady faded away; he was all alone with the violin. He played as he had never done before, and the music sounded like the rippling waves upon the seashore, and the sad song of a mermaid rising above it. Robert crept nearer and nearer to the child; but Beppino did not notice him. Longer and longer he played, and the sweat rolled off his poor, pinched face. Then, suddenly with a quick chord, he threw down the violin and began to weep.

Giovanni was very angry. Well, this would

be the end of their good luck now. Had the child no sense? He stood up. "We'd better be going, sir."

"Wait a moment." Mr. Carroll went across the room to his wife. "What do you think of that?" he asked, bending over her.

"It's beautiful! Wonderful! We must do something for the boy," she answered.

"I think so, too. Shall we let him come and share Robert's lessons?"

"Yes, do," and the sick lady's face looked brighter than it had for a long time.

"Show the boys some pictures, Robert, while I talk to the man," said Mr. Carroll.

Beppino, ashamed of his tears, had wiped his eyes on the ragged sleeve of his coat, and sat, a little sulkily, in a corner. He did not know what had made him cry; but he knew he had been so happy with the old violin until something made him feel, O! so sad. The child did not recognize the wonderful gift which God had bestowed upon him.

It was not hard to persuade Giovanni to allow Beppino to come there and share Robert's lessons. He was glad to do so, for he considered Beppino as part of the property, and if the child

was to have good fortune, Giovanni was pretty sure that he could manage to get a fair profit out of it.

From this day on there came a change in little Beppino's life, a change so remarkable that the boy almost feared that he would wake up and find it all a dream. Twice each week he went to the gentleman's house and was permitted to play on the old violin. The professor who gave the two boys lessons was very proud of his new pupil. Robert, who knew well that he could never succeed in learning to play the violin, stood back and watched the child press forward, grasping eagerly each fresh idea about music, seeking to make the most of his chance to improve. He did not mind any more the unkindness which Assunta heaped upon him. She was very angry because her Rodolfo had not taken the attention of the strangers, and vented her wrath upon little Beppino. However, he did not care much what she did, for he could steal away and practice on his cheap violin the exercises which the master had taught him, and dream about the day when he could once more mount the marble steps, and touch—O, so carefully!—the precious Stradivarius. Then, too,

he had a new suit and a pretty cap, with flowing blue ribbons, which was the envy of all the other children. Each time he took his lesson he was sent out into the kitchen to eat such a good dinner! Everything was going on nicely, and Beppino began to make plans for the future, when he could leave Giovanni and the cruel Assunta and fight his own way in the world. Then it was that something dreadful happened.

CHAPTER III.

“WHERE IS MY VIOLIN?”

IT was beginning to grow dark one warm evening in August. All of the Carroll family were out driving, for Mrs. Carroll was getting much stronger, and they hoped in another month to go back to their home in England. The only person left in the apartment was the cook, a woman over sixty years of age, who was a little blind. Francesco, the man, had gone out on an errand.

As the darkness grew deeper a little boy crept under the great entrance door opening on the street and spoke to the woman who sat at the gateway. She had not yet lighted the gas, for it was hot, and then, too, there were no families in the house. Everyone was away at the seashore or in the mountains, except the Carrolls, and they would not be back for a while longer.

“Is Mr. Carroll at home?” asked the boy.

“No, dear, they’re all out; the gentleman and the pretty sick lady and the young master.”

“ Will they be back soon? ”

“ Before long, I guess. Did you want them? ”

“ Well, you see,” the boy continued, “ I left my violin here to-day, when I came for my lesson, and I shall need it to-night to play at the cafés. I ought not to wait for them. Isn’t there anybody at home? ”

“ Old Sofia’s there. She’ll get it for you. So you’re the boy that plays so finely,” she called after him, as he ran quickly up the steps. He made some answer, but she could not understand what he said.

The boy rang the bell at the door of Mr. Carroll’s apartment, and trembled a little as he heard old Sofia’s footsteps coming down the hall. Suppose Mr. and Mrs. Carroll should be in, after all! Sometimes the *portiera* did not know. He had no reason to fear, however, for Sofia, in answer to his question, assured him that everyone was out. She, too, was sitting in the darkness, on account of the heat.

“ I’ll light a candle for you,” she said, hurrying away to the kitchen.

Before she could return, the boy had run quickly into the parlor and, groping his way to

the piano, moved his hands over it in search of the violin.

"I've got it!" he murmured, with a sigh of relief. Then, hastening into the corridor, he called to Sofia, who was coming from the kitchen with a lighted taper in her hand: "It's all right, Sofia. I found it." Slamming the door after him, he ran swiftly down the steps and past the *portiera*.

"Did you get it?" she asked, turning around from the gas jet which she was lighting.

But the boy made no reply; he was in too much of a hurry.

"Povero bambino!" ("Poor child!") she muttered; "if he doesn't go quickly, his master will whip him. Ah, me! it's a hard world for the poor."

Then she bowed and smiled, as a carriage drove up to the door, and Mr. Carroll jumped out, helping his wife to alight, half carrying her to a small elevator which was in the court. Robert followed, with his arms full of his mother's shawls and pillows.

When all three were seated on the velvet cushions, and the elevator began to ascend very slowly, Robert said, "Did you notice that boy,

father, who was running so fast, with the violin under his arm? ”

“ No, my son, I did not see him.”

“ It looked a good deal like Beppino, only the boy seemed a little larger.”

“ Poor little Beppino! ” remarked the mother, in the same pitiful tone which the *portiera* had used, “ I expect he will be out to-night, playing until midnight.”

“ If he keeps on with his lessons, he will some day be a great player, and can get away from that wicked man and take care of himself,” said Robert. “ You are going to keep on helping him, aren’t you, father, even though we go away? ”

“ If he behaves as well as he does now. But you cannot tell about such children. He has been badly brought up, and, though it has not been his fault, it may crop out somewhere.”

“ He has a good face,” responded his wife; and just then the elevator, having crept up the shaft, after the manner of Roman “lifts,” arrived at their landing. Little Beppino was forgotten for that evening.

The next morning Robert went into the parlor to practice on his violin. It was very, very

hot. Since May there had not been one drop of rain, and the streets fairly smoked with heat of the burning sunshine. The plants were withered in the garden, and even Mrs. Carroll's flowers in the shaded window were parched and lifeless. All Rome was gasping for breath.

Robert went to the window and looked out. In front of him lay a wide square, flooded with sunshine, and entirely deserted. In a dark, narrow street, leading away from it, men, women, and children were stretched in the cooler corners, not caring whether they lived or died. The river Tiber flowed along, a little distance away, very slowly, as if it, too, were so hot that it could not move as it usually did, and the dome of St. Peter's, which stood out against a dull, burnished sky, threw forth heat from its metal roof.

"Well, I'm glad we're going to get out of this furnace!" exclaimed Robert. "I don't believe there is another English-speaking person in the city. Rome, in the summer, is certainly the *burniest* place I ever struck! I'm so glad mother seems so much better. Now for practicing! I don't see why a person has to work when it's so hot! The Italians have some sense.

They just lie around and wait for it to cool off. But the English think they have to work just the same, and then they get sick. O, dear me! I wish I was an Italian!"

Thus grumbling, Robert dropped the dark Venetian blind, through which a hot wind was penetrating, and walked over to the piano. That afternoon the professor would come to give the lesson. Poor man! he had to work even if it were hot; and perhaps there were a few other Italians who could not be idle. Robert thought of several others now. And he had not practiced one single note since the last lesson! No doubt, during the heat, little Beppino, huddled down behind the shadow of the old house outside the walls, had worked faithfully! There was another example of industry on the part of the Italians.

With a sigh Robert sternly resolved to do his duty, and he went to the place where his violin usually was. He was very careless about it, and almost always forgot to put it in the case.

Suddenly his eyes opened wide. "Why, that's funny!" he exclaimed. "I was sure that I left my violin on the piano. I always do. But of course, I haven't practiced much



"HE RAN SWIFTLY." (Page 29.)

this week," he added, with a prick of conscience; "no doubt Francesco has stuck it away somewhere."

He searched everywhere, but in vain. No violin was there.

"A violin couldn't get lost! It's too big. Francesco!" he called, hearing the man's footsteps in the hall, "have you seen my violin? I thought I left it here on the piano."

"It was on the piano yesterday afternoon, I am sure, Signor Roberto. I saw it there." Francesco's olive face grew a little pale. It was a serious thing for the servants when anything was missing from the apartment.

"I was sure it was, too. Let's look for it."

So the two searched all over the apartment, except in Mrs. Carroll's room, where the invalid was still sleeping. Nowhere could they find the slightest trace of the violin.

Francesco's hands trembled. "I am positive that I saw it there yesterday afternoon, Signor Roberto," he repeated.

"Don't you be afraid, Francesco; I don't think *you* took it," Robert replied, with a laugh. He did not yet believe that the violin was lost. How could it be, when it was on the piano in

its accustomed place yesterday? "It'll turn up somewhere. Such things always do."

"Was it worth much?"

Francesco's face was still white. He knew what it meant to have the *carabinieri*, in their queer uniform and side pistols, come in and search an apartment for stolen goods. Perhaps he would be carried away to prison on suspicion by the police. No wonder he trembled!

"Something like ten thousand francs, two thousand dollars," said Robert, carelessly. "It was a very rare one, and very old. You know, the older they are the more they cost."

"Here comes the padrone! (master)" exclaimed Francesco, and then, like a shot, he sped down the hall and into the kitchen. "Ten thousand francs it cost!" he said, as he opened the door.

"What did?" asked old Sofia, turning around from her charcoal fire to see what was the matter.

"The young master's violin. What will become of us, Sofia? It's gone, *gone*, the old violin, for which the gentleman paid ten thousand francs—a fortune! What will become of us?"

Sofia threw down her spoon, and, regardless of the cookery on the fire, rushed to the door. "Don't you worry, Francesco, we sha'n't get arrested. You just guess I know who took that violin! The young rascal!" she muttered hurrying through the hall to the parlor.

Francesco, breathing more freely, went after her, and heard her say, as she knocked at the door, "Pardon, signore, but Francesco tells me that the young master has lost his violin."

"Yes; do you know anything about it, Sofia?"

"It's that boy you took in, sir, asking your pardon for speaking so frankly. You can't do that here, whatever you may do in England—which must be a very queer place," she added, under her breath. "It isn't safe to take in beggars off the street and let them play the violin in the parlor, and let them eat off the good dishes in the kitchen with a silver knife and fork. You've always got to pay for it."

Mr. Carroll waited patiently for the storm of Italian to cease. "Do you know anything about the violin?" he repeated, quietly.

The woman, as if in response to his tone, re-

plied more slowly: "Last night, sir, just before you and the lady came home, that young rascal came to the door and said that he had left his violin here and would need it in the evening. He asked if you were in, and then said he could find it himself, the thief!"

"Don't judge too quickly, Sofia. Are you sure it was Beppino?"

"Who else would be coming and inquiring about a violin, if it wasn't Beppino?" responded the old woman, in a tone of annoyance. "Indeed it was Beppino, sir. I could swear to him. Hasn't he eaten in my kitchen twice a week? Ask the *portiera*. She must have seen him when he came in. She's always there."

"Call her up."

In a few moments the *portiera* stood in the parlor and, although very much frightened, told the same story as Sofia.

"Shall I go and call the guard, sir?" asked Francesco, who was again smiling. It was very easy to call a guard for some one else.

"I will attend to all that," replied Mr. Carroll. "Thank you all very much for the information you have given me." He pressed a small coin into the hand of each one as they

passed out, and then, with a sad look on his face, he turned to his son. “Robert,” he continued, “this is a bad business. Didn’t you tell me that you thought you saw Bep-pino running with a violin in his hand?”

“Yes, father; but I may have made a mistake. I cannot believe that Beppino would do such a thing. Think of his face, father, how sweet and patient it is!”

“I know. He seemed to me a lovely child. But he has had the worst of training; he knows nothing good. I fear that the temptation was too great for him or for that wicked man with whom he lives, and who knows well the value of the instrument.”

Robert stood thinking a moment. “You won’t have him arrested, will you, father?” he pleaded. “He’s so little.”

“Perhaps not too little to steal, my boy. However, I will do what I can to find the violin, and, if possible, let the poor, ignorant child go free. I have no doubt that the man is far more guilty than he. Let us go out and see what we can do about it.”

Without saying anything to Mrs. Carroll, the father and son went out into the deserted

streets, where the sun was glaring on the white pavements, to see if they could find any trace of the violin without going to the authorities or to Beppino himself.

CHAPTER IV.

POOR LITTLE BEPPINO!

THAT afternoon, Beppino, with his hat stuck jauntily on the side of his head, went down through the city streets. He was thinking of how very strangely Assunta had acted that morning before he went out with Giovanni. She seemed to be very happy over something, and sang her queer Neapolitan airs in a loud, harsh voice.

“You enjoy your lessons, Beppino?” she asked, handing him out his usual breakfast, a crust of hard bread. There was a hard look in her eyes, which made the child shrink back. He was greatly afraid of Assunta.

“Very much,” he replied, and, seizing the bread, ran away.

She called after him, jeeringly, “Much luck may they bring you, little Beppino!” There was such a wicked, such a cruel tone in her voice that it made the words, which seemed like a blessing, sound like a curse. Beppino

had shivered, even though the sun was scorching hot.

They had stayed by him all day, these words of the woman, "Much luck may they bring you, little Beppino!" What could she have meant by them? Assunta never said anything kind, so she must have wished him evil in her heart. He knew that she was very angry, because, after Rodolfo had gone with Beppino three times, sitting in the beautiful room, with his great black eyes roving over all the wonderful things which were there, sometimes, when he thought nobody was looking, getting down to finger some delicate embroidery or costly vase, Mr. Carroll had told him not to come again. Assunta raved around the rough room at home, and beat Beppino, and would have torn his pretty new suit to pieces if Giovanni had not held her hands.

Ever since then she had been very harsh to the stranger child. Often, Beppino, covered with bruises, and with tears rolling down his thin cheeks, crept out to a deserted field to play over his exercises and cheer himself up.

He turned the corner of the street in which Mr. Carroll lived and his face brightened. Once

more he could touch the dear old violin, whose softest tone was richest music. He gave a smile to the *portiera*, who was sitting, as usual, in the doorway, knitting, and was springing past her, when she stopped him.

“Don’t go up,” she said, in a whisper; “it’s not safe.”

“Why not? Is anybody dead?” asked the boy, frightened at her tone and words.

“You put it on very well,” she responded; “for my part, I don’t see how you have the face to show yourself here so soon. But I don’t care; you’ve had a hard life, and you don’t know any better. I want to be your friend. How could you come here to-day, after what you did last night?”

“Last night!” Beppino looked up, bewildered. “I wasn’t here last night. I was way across the river by St. Peter’s. It was a *festa*, and there were lots of people there, and we made a lot of *soldi*.”

“Is the child crazy,” the woman murmured, “or did I dream? Wasn’t it you who came here about half past eight last night and wanted your violin?”

“No, how could I, when I went with Gio-

vanni at seven over there, and didn't get back till after eleven o'clock?" Beppino's eyes were big and round.

"Upon my word, I believe you, Beppino; but I tell you, you must get out of here quickly and make for home, or the *carabinieri* will catch you, sure!"

Beppino's heart began to beat fast and his legs shook. What had he done that the *carabinieri*—those big, rough policemen, who carried people away to prison—should want to get him, a poor little boy?

"The young master's violin is stolen," continued the woman, quickly, glancing about her to see if anyone was near. "A boy who looked like you came here last night and took it away. Run! Quick!"

Almost frightened out of his wits, the poor little fellow began to run, and, as rapidly as he could, he fled across the city and through the big gate, the Porta San Giovanni. Every few minutes he turned, thinking that the dreaded *carabinieri* were behind him; but no one was in sight. The guard stood at the gate, and he expected to feel a hand laid upon his shoulder each moment, but no hand touched him.

Breathless, almost tired to death, he entered the old, unfinished house, and fell like a hunted animal on the floor of the room which he called home.

Giovanni, in his absence, had taken the chance to rest, and was sleeping soundly when Beppino waked him by rushing in at the open doorway. Jumping up, he gave a kick at the boy's motionless figure.

“What's the matter with you? I thought you would not be back for another hour. They usually keep you and feed you up so well that you don't need anything more to eat until you go again. And it's little enough you get when Assunta's around,” he added, with a loud laugh.

Then he stooped over the child, who did not move. “What's the matter with him anyway? Here! wake up!”

But there was no movement. Giovanni, a little frightened, ran quickly out of doors to a little stream which flowed, cold and sparkling, from the far-away mountains, through a queer old carved Gorgon's head. Catching some of it in a battered cup, he hurried back and bathed the boy's temples, where the blue veins were so

distinct. Beppino sighed, took a long breath, and opened his eyes.

“ You’re funny ! ” said Giovanni, more kindly than he usually spoke. You’ve given me a bad fright. What under the sun did you come running in here in that way for, and fall down ? ”

“ Giovanni,” the boy whispered, “ somebody stole the Signor Roberto’s violin last night, and they think I did it. They’re going to send the *carabinieri* after me. O, save me ! save me ! ”

“ You didn’t steal it,” Giovanni replied ; “ you were with me all the evening ; but, of course, they wouldn’t believe it ; they’d think I put you up to it. It looks pretty bad.”

He thought a minute. Then he got up and looked down the street toward the city, and the bronzed face was white. “ I wish Assunta would come,” he muttered. “ Was it worth much, Beppino ? ”

“ The *portiera* said ten thousand francs,” replied Beppino, between his sobs, adding, with simplicity, “ I suppose that’s a good deal.”

Giovanni whistled. Then he got up and looked out again.

The sun was going down. A soft, purple

haze began to surround the old, rough house, but neither the man nor the boy noticed its beauty.

Giovanni's face brightened. Yonder came Assunta, and following her were the five children, with Rodolfo leading.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed the woman, when she saw a strange expression on her husband's face.

"Matter enough!" he answered, drawing her on one side and telling her Beppino's story.

"I always thought the young rascal would come to harm," she responded, in an exultant tone. "How much is the old violin worth?"

"Ten thousand lire."

"Ten thousand lire!" she replied, amazed. Then she laughed. "All the worse for him. I guess my Rodolfo won't be turned out of a gentleman's house again for the sake of a brat I found on the street!"

Her husband turned and looked at her sharply. "Do you know anything about the violin?" he asked.

"How should I?" she replied.

He was not satisfied, but continued: "Perhaps you do not realize my danger in this mat-

ter. Of course they will think that it is a put-up job, and that I am at the bottom of it. The boy did not take it. He was with me all the evening; but how can a poor man prove it? We must leave this place. It is dangerous for us."

When the night fell Giovanni and his family crept quietly away to seek a new and unknown home.

A week later a woman came softly around the side of the unfinished house. She groped about, feeling with her hands for a certain place in the ground. Then she dug deep into the earth and, drawing out a violin, wrapped it up in her old shawl and fled away into the darkness.

Life was hard indeed for little Beppino now! Giovanni, who dared not take the boy into the city to play on his violin, was very ugly to him. Assunta jeered at him as being the cause of all their troubles. He had little to eat, and was so weak that the least unkind word would bring tears. Everything was lost. The future had looked so bright. He had hoped to make a musician of himself, and had hoped to leave Giovanni. He was not a thief, but he must live as though he were. He was too little and too

ignorant to try to work out the mystery for himself, and too frightened to go directly to Mr. Carroll and declare his innocence.

One day he wandered away from the others and sat down on the hillside, where he could look at the beautiful blue mountains which lay around Rome. Some sheep were grazing nearby, occasionally raising their heads to gaze solemnly at the poor solitary boy. Then they went on nibbling the brown, dried-up grass, for as yet no cooling rain had come to Rome.

As he sat there he remembered something that had happened in June. He was walking along a wide, handsome street when he heard singing. The building looked like a church, and there was a cross over the door, so he went in. The large room within was all pure white, except some mild rays of pink and yellow which filtered through the stained-glass windows. There was no picture of Christ upon the cross, no statue of the Madonna, the mother of Jesus, and no altar decorated with gaudy paper flowers. Instead, there were masses of lovely blossoms, fresh from the gardens, and, in their midst, many children were singing.

The little fellow, hugging his violin to his

breast, stood for a while listening at the door, then he pressed forward into the crowd, until he was just behind the children.

Then he caught the words:

“ I have a Father in the Promised Land,

.

My Father calls me, I must go,

To meet him in the Promised Land.”

The great organ ceased, and Beppino slipped into a vacant seat.

In a few simple words a gentleman told the children about a loving Father in heaven, who sent Jesus to earth. How dearly the Father loved all children! He would give them all that they asked if, in his wisdom, he thought it best.

“ Don’t pray to the Madonna, children,” he said. “ She can do nothing for you. Pray to the Father, who loves you, and to Jesus Christ, who died for you.”

Beppino remembered every word of it, as he sat here on the hillside. The Father, God, would give him what he asked, if it were right. Suppose he should ask him, just now! The child, aching and bruised from blows, weak from hunger, knelt down and prayed for



"DON'T GO UP," SHE SAID IN A WHISPER. (Page 41.)

the first time in his life. He had often knelt beside Assunta in the big Catholic churches on festival days, for the woman thought it her duty to take the children to mass; but he had never *prayed*. He had only muttered over some words she told him to say. Here it was different. God must be very near by, outdoors, under the open sky. He could surely hear him, here.

The little sincere prayer arose to the Father, who looked down so pityingly upon the orphan boy: "Dear Father in heaven," Beppino said, "the man said you would do what we ask. Please help me to find the gentleman's violin. I didn't take it, Father in heaven, I really didn't. I was away over at St. Peter's that night. He was so good to me, Father in heaven. Please help me find the violin and take it back to him."

He did not know anything about saying "Amen," this little heathen boy. He knelt and knelt until the sun went down in a mass of golden-tinted clouds. Then he got up and went back to Giovanni. Surely the Father in heaven would help him to find the violin for the kind gentleman. And his heart was comforted.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAVE IN THE HILLSIDE.

WHEN Giovanni left the old house near the Porta San Giovanni to find a hiding place, he dared not remain within the city limits, so he went far out into the broad fields which lie about Rome. The father, mother, and the children, with Beppino, walked mile after mile into the country, and the summer's sun broke through the darkness, and everything was tinted rose in the soft morning light.

“Here we are!” cried Giovanni, throwing the bag, full of their few household belongings, down upon the ground. “This will do finely; don't you think so, Assunta?”

The woman nodded, and stood still to look at their new home, while the children, all but Beppino, capered with wild delight. This was the nicest place they had ever seen! All around lay the fields, and off on the right rose a steep hill, upon whose summit there was a ruined castle. Rodolfo promised himself that he would

soon climb that hill and find out what was in that broken-down house.

“Are we to live here, Babbo?” asked Maria, who was six, and the image of her mother.

For answer her father walked up to a large cave which was cut into the hill and peered about it. From above long creepers of wild ivy hung down and almost hid the entrance. Beppino's curiosity was aroused, and he pressed forward with the others to see this strange, new home. It looked very dark at first, and he could not distinguish anything, but, as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he saw that the cave was large, with a hard earth floor and a rounded roof. There were the remains of a fire in one corner, and other signs that some wanderers had lived there not long before.

“I'll go and get some bamboo,” said Giovanni. “Come, Rodolfo and Beppino, you can help me, and we'll soon get our house in shape. Then we can lie down and sleep.”

The man was in high good humor at the success of his escape from the city and the sharp eyes of the police.

“You see, I knew about this place,” he continued, as the two boys followed him into a

field where straight bamboo stalks were growing.

The river Tiber makes a great curve after leaving Rome, and winds itself around like a sinewy water snake near the place where the fugitives had taken refuge. Along its banks grew the bamboo, the only green thing to be seen in all the country, for Italy was thirsting for rain.

The three gathered a huge armful of the bamboo stalks, most of them more than six feet tall, and, carrying them back to the cave, planted them across the entrance, so that the opening was entirely concealed.

"It'll be hard work for the *carabinieri* to catch us now," muttered Giovanni, examining with a satisfied air the results of his labors.

"Hist! There's a couple of them coming now!" exclaimed Rodolfo.

Almost before the words were out of his mouth the entire family had disappeared inside the cave. Beppino was among the first, for he was terribly afraid of getting arrested for a sin which he had never committed.

The two policemen, like those who patrol Italy in all directions, to protect property and people,

wore uniforms of dark blue cloth, with quaintly shaped three-cornered hats. They were on horseback, and the frightened group within the cave huddled down more closely in the darkness when they heard the ring of the horses' hoofs upon the hard ground.

As the sound died away Giovanni got up, but his humor had changed. "It's all your fault!" he shouted, going over to little Beppino, who was crouching in fear. "Why did we ever take you in when we found you starving upon the street?"

If Beppino had dared, he would have quickly replied, "Because you knew you could use me to get money," but he was only a weak child, in the power of a cruel man and woman, so he kept silent, and bore patiently the blows which rained down upon his frail body.

"You've brought us nothing but bad luck," said the man, with an oath, "and I wish I had left you to die of cold and hunger."

Assunta looked on, smiling exultantly. Then, turning to give a kiss to Rodolfo, she said, "My little son, you see what a bad boy Beppino is."

“Does he get whipped because of the violin that I—”

Assunta put her hand over his mouth, and looked at him so threateningly that he shrank back. “Lie down and go to sleep,” she continued, aloud; then, as he sank on the ground, she added, in a whisper, “if you ever breathe a word about that, you know what will happen.”

Rodolfo sobbed, but, obediently turning on his side, was soon asleep.

In this cave, only one of hundreds which were cut into the low hills, within a few miles of Rome, and which were used as homes by many poor persons, Giovanni's family lived. The cave was a cool refuge from the blazing sun, and they managed to exist, chiefly by stealing vegetables from the gardens of the villas which were near them, or grapes and figs from the trees and vines upon the campagna, as the flat country surrounding Rome is called. Bread they had not, for it was not safe to venture into the city.

It was now the second week in September, two weeks since Beppino had said his prayer to the Father in heaven, with his face turned up-



"DON'T YOU DARE TO COME BACK!" SHE CRIED. (Page 57.)

ward to the clear blue sky. But no answer had come. Each day, in childish faith, the boy had repeated the words, "Dear Father in heaven, please help me to find the violin, that I may take it back to the kind gentleman." And one day, crying as if his little heart would break, he added another petition, "O, dear Father in heaven, please help me to find it, for I am so sorry that they should think me a thief." But no answer came, and Beppino began to lose faith. No doubt these people who did not pray to the Mother Mary were wrong. The Father in heaven would not hear the prayer of a little child. Next time he would pray to the Madonna, who, so Assunta had told him once, would ask the Lord, her Son, and the Lord, who loved his mother, would do anything she said.

"Yes," Beppino thought, "I have made a mistake. I ought to have prayed to Mary. I've lost all this time."

That night a bank of black clouds arose in the west, just as the sun went down. The distant thunder rolled, and the flashes of lightning lit up the sky. Beppino was very much afraid in a thunderstorm, and he crept into the cave,

going close to Assunta, in hopes that she might be a little kind to him. Assunta, however, whether affected by the storm which was so rapidly approaching or by the pangs of hunger—for they all began to suffer from lack of bread—was very cross. There came a bright flash of lightning and then a heavy roll of thunder, sounding like the echo of a great battle. Beppino, in fear, timidly laid his hand on the woman's coarse dress. She threw it off impatiently.

“O, it's you, is it? You expect me to coddle and pet *you*, who have brought us to this state! I tell you, I will have nothing more to do with you! Eight years you've eaten our bread and shared our home, and it's because of your stealing that violin of the Englishman that we're here, far from Rome, with nothing to eat and the children starving!” She stood up now and put her heavy hand on the terrified child's shoulder. “Get out of here, I say!” and she struck the poor child across the face.

“O, not to-night!” he pleaded. “It's raining, and I'm so afraid.”

“Yes, to-night, baby.” She dragged him toward the door.

“And my violin! Let me get my violin!”

Beppino struggled to get up, but it was of no use. The strong hands held him.

“Your violin! I guess not. It’s your miserable music that’s brought us here.”

Assunta carried him to the bamboo wall and thrust him through it, out into the storm. “Don’t you dare to come back!” she cried, and went to the children.

Beppino, blinded by the storm, terrified by the lightning, wandered back and forth, and then, exhausted, sank down upon the side of the hill. He thought he was a long way off from that awful woman, but, in reality, he was very close to her, lying upon the slope at the side of the cave. The drought of four months was broken, and the rains had come to bring life and freshness to Rome. But they had come in fury.

All night long the floods of rain fell, and they beat upon the little boy’s feeble body. In vain he tried to burrow in the earth and seek shelter under the bushes. The rain found him and soaked his light clothing until he was chilled and shivering. The thunder crashed, and the lightning, in blinding flashes of blue and red

copper, shot over the sky. Beppino put a little hand up over his eyes to keep out the awful sight, and threw himself, face downward, on the wet ground.

Ah! Father in heaven, art thou looking down upon this poor, little homeless boy?



"HE STOOPED AND DREW OUT A WATER-SOAKED VIOLIN." (Page 60.)

CHAPTER VI.

JOY IN THE MORNING.

BEPPINO sat up and looked about him. The storm had passed away, and the sky was as blue and the sunshine as golden as though it had never rained. Every bone in his body ached. Raising himself on his elbow, he peered over the side of the hill on which he lay. There was the cave where Assunta was with the children. There were the canes of bamboo which he and Giovanni and Rodolfo had planted on that day—so long ago, it seemed to his childish mind—when they came to this new home! What should he do? Anything to get away from this place and from the cruel woman who had so abused him.

What did it matter if the police did catch him and take him to prison? Assunta could not follow him there. Full of his own thought, he prepared to run as fast as he could toward Rome when something unusual attracted his attention.

The great quantity of water which had fallen in the night had washed down the hillside, carrying with it large portions of earth. What caught Beppino's eye was a hole in the ground on the slope of the mound, a little away from him. There was something in it.

"I do wonder what it is!" he said half aloud, and, entirely forgetting his fear of Asunta and his danger while so near the cave, he dug around the object with his little brown fingers.

In a few moments he had made the opening larger, and his eyes grew round as he looked down into it. He stooped and drew out a water-soaked and muddy violin.

"It's a funny place to put a violin," murmured the little fellow, not suspecting how it had come there. He turned it over and over and rubbed off the mud. Suddenly he jumped up and his heart began to beat fast.

"It's the gentleman's violin; the one he thought I stole!" he exclaimed. "'There's the mark which the young master showed me that tells how old it is. I've found it! I've found it!"

Then a thought came to him, and he did

what the ungrateful lepers forgot to do when Jesus made them whole again, and what most of us forget to do each day we live. This poor, ignorant, homeless boy laid the precious violin down on the ground beside him, and, regardless of the family inside the cave, he knelt upon the wet ground and thanked God.

“Dear Father in heaven,” he prayed, “thank you so much for letting me find the gentleman’s violin. And I promise you, dear Father in heaven, that after this I’ll always kneel down and ask you for everything I want without bothering about the Mother Mary.”

Fortunately for him, everybody in the cave was sleeping soundly. Off in the distance Bep-pino could see the towers of Rome, with the great dome of St. Peter’s rising above them all, and he ran that way as swiftly as his lameness would let him, carrying the violin. His heart was light and happy because he could take Mr. Carroll’s violin back to him, and because those who had been so kind to him would know that he was not a thief. But who had stolen the violin, anyway? Surely not Rodolfo! The problem was too much for his little brain, and he gave it up. What difference who

took the violin? Here it was safe and sound.

Giovanni had gone away from the cave the day before to see if he could find something for the family to eat in one of the small villages. As he was returning the thunderstorm came up, and he crept under a haycock for shelter, and had been very comfortable. He returned home about eight o'clock in the morning in high good humor, for he brought provisions enough for a week. In the cave all were still sleeping, but wakened on his entrance.

"Where's Beppino?" he asked, looking around.

Assunta hesitated.

"Mother put him out," spoke up Rodolfo. "She hit him and told him not to come back any more, and it rained awful."

"You ought to have known better," he exclaimed, in anger. "That boy earns more with his music than all the rest of you put together. This affair of the violin would soon blow over. The English family is going away; it would soon be forgotten."

"Rodolfo can learn to play the violin as well as that young one," replied the woman.

“You know well enough he hasn’t a grain of music in him. You’ve always hated the boy because he could play better than Rodolfo.”

Assunta tossed her head. In her heart she knew that Giovanni was right.

“Why don’t you tell him about the violin?” whispered Rodolfo, when Giovanni had gone outside.

She gave him an angry look. Then she ran out quickly. A sudden fear had struck her. She rushed to the hole in the hillside. The violin she had buried there was gone!

“What is it, Assunta?” asked Giovanni, coming to her side.

Wringing her hands, and between her sobs, Assunta told her husband all; how, from jealousy of Beppino, she had sent Rodolfo to steal the violin, knowing that the blame would naturally fall on Beppino, and how she had hidden it in the ground, not daring to take it to the pawnshop.

Giovanni listened quietly. “I suspected that it was something of this kind. Your foolish jealousy has made us an immense amount of trouble, Assunta, and has lost us a great deal of money, for the Englishman would have

trained Beppino to be a great player, and our fortunes would have been made."

"I should think you could catch the boy yet," she said, with a glimmer of hope. "He can't get very far away."

"Don't you understand, Assunta, that he must have stayed near by here all night? I believe he found the violin. We shall have to hurry away, far away from Rome, now. It is not safe for us here another hour. And it is all your fault!" he exclaimed, angrily.

In a few moments the whole family, ragged and sad, were walking toward the north, where they found a new home in the lonely mountains.

Beppino ran wearily on toward the city. Past the shops outside the walls he went, and eyed hungrily the huge chunks of bread which were piled up in the windows of the bakeries. But he had no money to buy even a penny's worth, and he was so very, very hungry! The violin, too, began to be heavy. He was so tired and he seemed to be strangely weak. Every once in a while there was a queer blackness around him, in spite of the brilliant sunshine.

Beppino hurried under the Porta del Popolo

and across the beautiful square where the ancient obelisk stood and the fountains were playing. The palms upon the Pincian Hill were green and fresh looking after the grateful rain, but the boy did not notice any of these beauties. He felt strangely cold, even though it was a hot September day, and the blackness came oftener. It was only a few steps now; then he stood before the *portiera* once more.

“Is the English gentleman at home?” he asked.

She looked closely at him.

“Why, you’re the little fellow who used to play the violin, aren’t you? You are sick, aren’t you?”

He shook his head, impatiently.

“Yes,” she continued, “the gentleman’s at home, but you’ve come just in time, for they’re all going to England to-morrow. The lady’s been worse, or they would have gone before. You are certainly ill!” she exclaimed, as Bepino leaned up against the wall.

“I don’t know,” he replied. “I must see the gentleman. I’ve brought his violin back.”

“You don’t say! I’m glad. Then you didn’t steal it, after all? I never believed you did.

Now, look here; I'll just send you up in the elevator. You can't walk up all those stairs."

The good-hearted woman helped him to the elevator and watched it rise.

"*Poveretto!*" ("Poor little fellow!") she murmured.

Mr. and Mrs. Carroll and Robert were in the parlor when Francesco came in, with a smile on his face.

"Little Beppino wants to see you, sir," he said.

"Beppino!" exclaimed Robert, while his father said, "Show him in here, Francesco."

Mr. Carroll's anger all melted away when he saw the pitiful figure, with its drawn, white face, standing in the doorway.

The child, walking with difficulty, crossed the room to Mr. Carroll. "I've—I've brought your violin back, sir; and, please, sir, I didn't steal it," he said, and then sank in a little heap on the soft carpet.

There is a good deal more about little Beppino, but it would take too long to tell it now.

He was very, very ill for several months, and the Carrolls did not go to England after all.

They stayed in Rome that winter, and poor little Beppino never had been so happy, and never had imagined that anyone *could* be so happy, as he was during those cold months. His face grew round and rosy, and Giovanni, if he had met him on the street, would not have recognized him. He often wondered what had become of his master and the children, for he loved his playmates, even though they had sometimes been unkind to him, but he never saw any of them again.

At the Easter time, when the air was full of the sweetness of lilies and violets, the Carroll family went away, and little Beppino went with them, to be as their own son.

Maybe, some day, you will hear "Signor Giuseppe," the famous violinist, play in a crowded concert hall, and you will hear him make wonderful music on that same old "Stradivarius," which he rescued in such a strange way. In spite of the dampness and the dirt with which it was covered it is full of rich and harmonious melody.

All through these years Beppino has learned to love and to trust more and more the dear Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ.

He says that every time he plays on the old violin he prays to the Father that he may, through the music, bring to some person new hope and courage and more inspiration to be good and live right, just as God wishes them to do.

THE END.

Oct 26 1901

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